Committee on Student Fees and Budget Review

UNIT REPORT: EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Raj Thanabal, Budget Analyst
Alex Galvin, Budget Analyst

Unit Contacts

Jenn Stringer
Director, Educational Technology Services

Steve Garber
Associate Director, Educational Technology Services

Introduction to the Unit

Educational Technology Services (ETS) is the campus unit responsible for maintaining technologies related to classroom instruction, including bSpace, bCourses, CalCentral, online course evaluations, webcasting, technology training and support, computer facilities, and classroom technology such as projectors.

ETS serves the entire UC Berkeley student population on a daily basis through classroom technology, computing centers, and through bSpace and bCourses. ETS supports virtually every course at UC Berkeley with 3,500 courses using some form of ETS technology. Currently over 2/3 of all UC Berkeley courses utilize bCourses, while the remaining third use bSpace. Next semester all courses except large class exceptions (less than 200 courses for faculty who need more time to adjust to bCourses) will be using bCourses. By Fall 2015, bSpace will be completely shut down and fully replaced by bCourses.

ETS is funded through both revenue and campus funding. For the current year, ETS generated $591,424 in revenue, received $8.2 million in campus support and operating transfers, and had a projected net surplus of $242,988, however the unit is currently in a structural deficit, meaning that the unit doesn't have enough ongoing funding to pay for the services they offer. ETS is projected to have a net deficit if the status quo is maintained and the unit does not continue to receive some form of ongoing or one time funding. In the past year, ETS received one-time funds to be used for CalCentral and for licensing TurnItIn services.

This year, ETS is rolling out new learning management system and has expanded hours in computing labs in Wheeler so that students can study in the evening. The additional hours are part of a 1-year pilot program financed through auxiliary funding. ETS is also currently rolling out online course evaluations department by department and about 60% of students are being touched by this service. In addition, ETS just kicked off a user advisory group with representation from ASUC and the Graduate Assembly so that they have an advisory support around the recommendations for services. This user advisory group will help to garner additional student input and improve the way input is received.

Unit Director Meeting Findings

ETS has been underfunded for a long time and funding has been an ongoing issue with ETS as the unit primarily operates through one time funding. ETS has therefore relied on one-time funding for specific project and being very dependent on divisional support. In its current operational deficit, ETS doesn't have enough funding to maintain its spending rate and expects a $700,000 deficit by the 2015 fiscal year if the expected one-time funding isn't given and everything else stays constant. In order to deal with this projected deficit, ETS has enlisted the help of the undergraduate advisory group in order to help make best recommendations and prioritize the services that ETS offers. In order to mitigate the projected deficit, ETS identifies the costs of each of the 17 services and utilize the undergraduate advisory group to prioritize them. Finally, a campus decision would be made on how to deal with deficit by outlining costs and prioritization of each service. Either funding would be given to ETS to fill deficit or student leadership would make a decision to cut certain services.

Currently, ETS is experiencing a great deal of issues around accessibility with the amount of online content that is inaccessible for students with certain disabilities. The UC system created an electronic accessibility mandate to ensure that each UC got funding to outline making content accessible to students. This mandate is very pertinent to ETS because it means that ETS is forced to spend more time and resources in order to comply with the new UC guidelines.

ETS receives $800,000 through recharge operations, which is the audio and visual support that ETS provides to the campus. Recharge operations, however, aren't truly revenue because although the money it made through operations, the university mandates that the money can only be used for up to 8% more than what total expenses were. Therefore, ETS doesn't generate any additional money off of recharge operations. In addition, ETS generates money from student printing fees and renting instructional computing facilities over summer, and although this money shows up as revenue, it is typically just used to recoup costs. Finally, ETS also leases out bandwidth as a source of income to cover general operating expenses.

Compliance with Guidelines

The SSF guidelines indicate that the student services fee is intended for use for, but not limited to: services related to psychological health and well-being of students, social and recreational programs, services related to campus life and community, and career support.

In accordance with the guidelines, SSF funds are used by ETS for technology services and programs, all of which are supplementary and support non-core instructional programs. It is therefore clear that that ETS is in compliance with the guidelines for SSF allocation usage.

Preliminary Recommendations

The scope of services that ETS provides significantly benefits the entire UC Berkeley student body in order to help students in a variety of ways. ETS continues to be a very high priority among all students considering that nearly all faculty and undergraduates use classroom technology, bSpace and/or bCourses. In addition to the online technology that ETS provides, the use of physical technology and computing centers and critical to the student population and indicate that ETS should be highly prioritized when it comes to funding.

If the SSF allocation were to increase, it would alleviate some financial pressure on the ETS budget, and allow for all seventeen of the services ETS provides to continue. An increase in SSF funding would also support future projects. For example, ETS is currently working on a project called the digital studio for faculty and GSIs to create content for courses. This digital studio would be primarily designed so that faculty can get help and improve the digital content in their courses. Jenn Stringer indicated that universal accessibility of online content for the UC Berkeley student population is the most important issue right now and is essentially an unfunded mandate at the moment. However, given that the UC mandate for universal accessibility is on a system-wide scale, it would not be appropriate to allocate additional SSF funding for this purpose. The campus should look to support the UC wide mandate through general funds rather than via SSF allocation, especially considering that this mandate is not specific to UC Berkeley.

Our preliminary recommendation is that SSF funding should be maintained in order to continue supporting the beneficial services that ETS provides to the entire UC Berkeley population and general campus funding to ETS should be increased to support the UC universal accessibility mandate. The SSF allocation was just increased last semester and is currently at a reasonable level to maintain current operations. Last year, ETS had a surplus of SSF money and although ETS is very dependent on one-time funding, Jenn Stringer indicated that ETS is very likely to receive one time funding for this year and in the future. While ETS is evidently a clear priority among the UC Berkeley student population, SSF funding for ETS should be maintained in order to provide money via SSF to other areas on campus that critically require it. In addition, campus general funding to ETS should increase in order to support UC Berkeley's ability to support the UC universal accessibility mandate.